

1. Discuss the aesthetics of the birth film using Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving* (from the first half of the course) and *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* [film did not arrive] and Gunvor Nelson's *Kirsa Nicholina*. Be sure to include a discussion of the point or goal of making a birth film. Why document the event and make art of it? What makes one birth film aesthetically better than another?

The objectification of the women in the two birth films seen in class, *Window Water Baby Moving* and *Kirsa Nicholina*, is perhaps representative of two elements. One, the notion that mothers are mothers, not real people with feelings, individualities. They are self-sacrificing servants of their husbands and children, and thus one can consider these two films as being about women's entry into non-existence as individuals as soon as the tiny dictator is born. Therefore; go ahead and poke the camera in their faces, and between their legs. They won't mind, they are moms.

Brakhage takes possession of the moment, the sense of Jane's experience is diminished, and the baby is almost entirely forgotten. What Brakhage's images concentrate on is the losing battle of light against shadow, force, violent motion linked to his own presence--violent hand motion jerking down onto Jane's swollen belly, rapid battering "hugs" of Jane's head which seems almost dismembered, while his own mouth is agape with triumphant laughter. While the use of rapid cutting is aesthetically innovative, and a Brakhage trait, it bears on the interpretation of the content and reinforces the sense of violence, especially in the hugging sequence which in rapid repetition resembles battering. Also through repetition and extreme close up, his fixation on the image of blood trickling from Jane's vagina seems indicative of his own fear and uncertainty about the event.

Closeups of the mothers' faces and vaginas abound in both films, as well as the strong references to water (tub, ocean). I read the water images as further symbolizing the celebration of the origins of life--the message of both films seeming to be that love creates life creates art, and this has been true since the beginning and this is good.... When Brakhage cuts in shots of Jane smiling and Jane in the tub at an earlier time with shots of her face during painful contractions, he recreates that aspect of the birth process where pain gives way to excitement and anticipation, then back to pain for fleeting moments at a time.

Brakhage intercuts shots of Jane in the bathtub with Jane on the delivery table in his typical style. Quick cuts, changing exposures, shifting points of view and points in time, and film stock treatments result in a jarring, violent presentation of the event. I dreaded the film as I watched, knowing the next moment might be Jane's smiling face or her bloody crotch.

How little he has been able to grasp of the experience of birth FROM JANE'S POINT OF VIEW. His decision to film the event from strictly his own point of view, makes this film very difficult to see as a birth film. He completely ignores--or is ignorant of--the emotional and psychological fortitude required to transcend the physical strain of birth, and find in it the goal, the process of creating life that is actually going on. What Brakhage's images completely dismiss is the active participation that Jane--awake and aware during the whole ordeal--contributes to the accomplishment of the task. The journey of the fetus to the mouth of the vagina and safely out into the world, is greatly facilitated by the cooperative actions of the mother in that she must push or resist pushing, she must acquiesce to the contractions by relaxing, among the other nitty-gritty things like not eating, choosing to have an enema at the start of the labour so that the pressure on the bowels while giving birth won't cause a temporary state of incontinence, etc.

...Nelson did not think to place the camera, even once, to show the woman's pov of the event. Her view, looking up at surrounding friends and family, or down across the expanse of swollen belly, would have brought her into the film as a semi-author of the film, instead of just being its content. (Of course, the desire to not pester the laboring woman too much might discourage a filmmaker from trying to shoot such a shot--but then, aren't the hot lights the camera requires already an

annoyance?).

I don't recognize the aesthetic value of filming a woman's actual delivery of her child, then assembling the images into a showpiece for public distribution. I don't believe I have the right, as an uninvolved spectator, to witness such a private event. The mother and father may not feel their privacy is being invaded, but I feel both theirs and mine are. As a captive audience in a film class, I am exposed to an experience which emotionally I am not prepared to see, much less judge as a work of art.